

# Interpreting Kerala's Social Development



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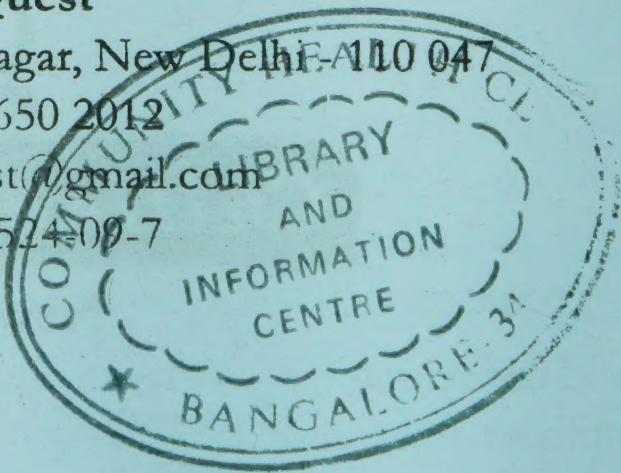
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# Interpreting Kerala's Social Development

The Malayalis today have a distinct image among the peoples of India, and social development in Kerala over the decades has been markedly different, generally for the better, from that of the rest of the country. In recent years, this fact is being deservedly recognized and highlighted both in popular and academic discourses.<sup>1</sup> Social scientists now talk of the 'Kerala model of development'.<sup>2</sup> Demographic change here, characterised by low rates of fertility and mortality, resembles that of some of the developed countries of the West—infant mortality in Kerala is 27 per thousand while for the whole of India 86, birth rate 22 for 32 and life expectation 68 for 57. Mass literacy of the state is indeed a model for emulation. The rate of adult literacy a decade ago for Kerala was 78% and for India 43%; wages of agricultural labourers and other workers here are higher than elsewhere, indicating a narrower gap between the haves and the have-nots; the high level of female employment both in and outside the state is truly a mark of emergence of women in the public sphere and relative lack of gender discrimination within society at least in some areas; in the matter of basic services such as post offices, schools, bus-stops, public distribution system, health centres and banks, Kerala ranks first among all other states; the state is again noted for its low incidence of communal or caste violence; and the general level of socio-political consciousness is comparatively higher and its spread, unusually wide.<sup>3</sup> In short, while nowhere near being a utopia and increasingly under pressures of various kinds along with the rest of the country, from lack of industrialization, employment and generally of economic development on the one hand and increasing communalisation and corruption of culture and society, on the other, the society in Kerala is still marked by a certain degree of harmony and the people, by a self-confidence, when compared to the state of society in many other parts of the subcontinent.

How did this relatively wholesome totality and forward thrust in social development come about? What were the historical and sociological

circumstances that made such a development possible? And is it possible to draw any inspiration from this, for present and future action not only for the other cultures and regions of the country but also for Kerala itself, increasingly being bogged down by numerous, particularly economic problems?

The key to Kerala's peculiar social development has been identified variously: the early spread of education, the region's exposure to foreign influences, the success of land reform in the post-independent period, the social reform and public action in general and as the influence of the progressive policies of the successive governments. A good amount of such explanations has no use of history; another set attributes the outcome to the policy measures of the successive governments; and others suggest vaguely, the social reform movements or public action as causal factors.<sup>4</sup> It is contended here, that most such explanations are untenable, for they confuse consequence with cause and in those few cases which seem to touch upon the causal factors, they are vague and, explanation insufficient. In contrast, it is argued that Kerala's present differential social development is the result of, and founded upon, its earlier, relatively continuous, consistent and conserving character of ideological, attitudinal and actual transformation in social relations brought about specifically by systematic and inclusively collective action of the 'lower' orders of the society against the system and spirit of region-specific socio-cultural hierarchy. In other words, the present societal well-being is to be seen in the context of several historically givens, basically as the outcome of a number of specific anti-ascriptivity (caste) struggles that had shaken the colonially propped up and politicized traditional-hierarchical social order during the last two hundred or so years, progressively encompassing more and more sections of the population, laying thus the foundation for the subsequent relatively more fair and egalitarian appropriation of the fruits of the official and non-official developmental efforts.

Modernity dawned on Kerala during the colonial period as elsewhere, but comparatively speaking, in a more inclusive and systematic way. Certain objective conditions made possible and easier certain other subjective developments here. This tiny state, then divided into several kingdoms, did have certain geographical and demographic advantages. The fact that the region was small in size, fairly removed from the scene of major imperialist, anti-imperialist or later nationalist interventions,

that significant portions of the region till the end did not come under the direct rule of the British and that the Malayalam speaking people was divided roughly in three equal religious sections - Hindu, Muslim and Christian - all these did create a favourable environment in initiating and sustaining several socio-political movements from various levels of the social structure relatively autonomously. The progressive social-cultural forces released through these anti-tradition movements, giving birth to a number of organisations, institutions and democratic, structural, semantic as well as attitudinal changes in group and personal relations, taken together, constitute Kerala's entry into modernity, as elsewhere in the sub-continent. The point is that transition here was extraordinary not only in its sheer size but also in its systematic and ripple-like progression, ever-widening and engulfing more and more sections of the people, eventually enabling all sections to construct and imagine the new public sphere and constitute what is today, the civil society of Kerala.<sup>5</sup> It is precisely this basic process of preparing, more accurately, loosening and leveling of the cultural soil, that is, the creation of a somewhat level playing ground for the hitherto hierarchically placed castes and communities, with attendant intellectual-moral consensus on the modern mode of social relations that underwrote the relative success of the simultaneous and subsequent collective developmental efforts as well as the policy measures of the different governments.<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, the attempt is to abstract the crucial aspects of the social-historical development of the region and interpretatively narrate a coherent story, as an explanation of how and why the kind of social development that emerged in this part of the country has been made possible.

### **I. Pre-modern Kerala: Hierarchy and Fragmentation**

The Malayali society of pre-modern times, like most others of the subcontinent, was at once hierarchically structured and territorially fragmented. The caste/varna system as the dominant principle of social relation was in practice here with utmost seriousness and in all its ritual rigour of purity/pollution and regional specificity. The society was based on status, determined at birth. The Nambudiri Brahmins stood at the top of the social pyramid and were accorded the highest social status. The rest of the castes and their worth were measured in terms of their presumed purity/pollution with reference to and physical distance from these 'semi-divine' beings. Writes late Prof. M.S.A. Rao, "the Izhavas

had to keep between twenty to thirty six feet away from the Nambudiris, the Cherumas and the Pulayas sixty four feet and the Nayadis seventy two feet. There were also some tribes whose mere sight polluted the Nambudiris, but only a touch of a Nayar polluted them." (1979: 24)

The ritual hierarchy was symbolic of socio-economic stratification and differential access to resources within society and culture. Rights over land, the source of most of the wealth in pre-modern times, for example, were structured in a three tier fashion: the *Jenmis*, that is, the Nambudiris and a few aristocratic Nayars owned the land but did not cultivate it; the *Kanams*, tenants for twelve years were drawn mainly from the Nayar communities and these too did not have to work; finally *Verumpattam*, three year lease holders, were mainly the Izhavas and these were the actual cultivators. Below these were those castes who had no right over land but formed the bulk of the agricultural labourers - the Cherumas, Pulayas and Parayas; they all were more often than not, agrestic slaves with no rights even over their own persons. The non-'Hindu' population, of Christians and Muslims too, despite their egalitarian religious visions of social order, in practice reproduced a somewhat attenuated and class-dominated versions of the same social hierarchies within themselves and were accommodated in the overall system - the Christians generally somewhere around the middle and the Muslims below them. There were significant variations in the different regions of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, but by and large the entire ethno-linguistic society was held together in such a culture-specific form of socio-religious hierarchy.<sup>7</sup>

Religious and socio-economic hierarchical organisation also meant gradations or discriminatory differentiations in public-civil rights of the groups. The communities were not invested with uniform rights and duties: differential restrictions and liabilities were imposed on all of them; freedom of movement, choice of occupation, of food, dress and manner were distributed unevenly and inequitably over the social structure. The lower castes, for example, could not have access to public places such as main roads, thoroughfares, public tanks and temples; education was a monopoly of the few; the agrarian system bound the masses to the land, thus inhibiting spatial and social mobility; and their polluted status disabled them from seeking respectable occupations. Public life was managed entirely by the 'twice-born' castes, the Nambudiris and the Nayars while the general mass was relegated to a socio-political limbo.<sup>8</sup> Lack of comradeship across groups was an indication of the absence of common citizenship. In other words, there was no civil society.

Again, the Malayali society was fragmented in terms of territorial politics. The people inhabiting the South-West corner of the Indian peninsula, from Travancore to Malabar had already developed a common Malayali ethnicity centuries before the British rule. Malayalam was the lingua franca of this part of the country at least since the 15<sup>th</sup> century; the form of religion - both Brahminical as well as popular Hinduism, practised here was also distinct from that of other regions, attenuated as it was by the strong presence of the Christians and Muslims. The same could also be said of the Malayali version of Christianity and Islam. A common linguistic-cultural bond did unite all these communities. The sense of 'Malayaliness' expressed itself across the region through language (though non-standardised), common social traditions, and celebration of some ethno-wide festivals, and also by a specific configuration of the caste system. The ethnic community as a whole was cradled and has been nurtured by an ecological semi-isolation - the sea on the west and mountain ranges on the East.<sup>9</sup> However, the *ethnie* (ethnic group) was not yet 'politicised as a whole' and Kerala remained politically fragmented. Prior to the coming of the British, the territory was ruled by local rajas of Travancore, Cochi, Calicut and Chirakal by hereditary right, who often fought among themselves. Just as egalitarian social fellowship was absent, a unified politico-cultural consciousness demanding integration of the fragments too, was yet to emerge. In other words, the Malayali *ethnie* though highly developed and diversified in terms of culture, was not modernised either socially, through the acceptance of the principle of egalitarianism or politically, through integration of the scattered kingdoms. The story of the unfolding of civil society in Kerala is the tortuous and contestatious historical process by which the ethnic group as a whole became sensitive to social egalitarianism in principle and the polity unified.<sup>10</sup>

## II. Transition

The pre-modern hierarchical social order - expressive of ascriptive fixity, discriminatory apportioning of resources and privileges/liabilities, dynastic rulership and fragmented polity - began to give way and the unfolding of new civil society started in Kerala as early as the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several changes underlie this monumental process: the establishment of British political control in the South, that is, the taking over of Malabar and its integration with the Madras Presidency and the appointment of political agents to the Travancore and Cochin

kingdoms; the penetration of the interior by the missionaries, the spread of plantations and commerce and education, leading to the increased spatial and subsequently social mobility of communities; and the break up of Nayar *tarwad* and *marumakka-thayam* system. The British rule itself, at least in its manifest objectives and declared policies, particularly during its first half, was more or less biased towards the controllers of land resources - the Brahmin and the Brahminised to the neglect of the lower tenure-holders as well as the agricultural labourers. The British's own notions of private property coupled with their policy of non-interference in religio-cultural matters of the natives - what has come to be known as the indirect rule - massively affected the structure and semantics of the society, aggravating the already exploitative social relations among the different sections of the population.<sup>11</sup> The same process could also be observed in the Muslim-dominated areas. Escalation of landlordism provoked the Muslim tenantry not merely to a series of revolts against oppression but also to trigger social reforms within, leading to an incipient conception of modernity. At the same time however, through the installation of the modern and mass-based institutions, the 'new' and modern in social relations were being introduced. Juridical egalitarianism and more specifically, rule of law, made its appearance in courts, bureaucratic procedures and other public institutions, though in a haphazard manner, and the same was also gaining ground, again very slowly, as the new principle of legitimacy in general social relations. That the old order was giving way in its very foundations and that it was in their overall interests, was not lost on that majority of people, who for millennia was held under the multiple tyranny of the system. The newly developing cracks in the system were actively seized upon as so many opportunities by the hitherto relegated masses to push forward their cause of egalitarian emergence through subversion, sabotage and manipulation and thereby hastening the fall of the old order and appropriating the newly opening politico-economic as well as cultural spaces. From within the bottom of the ascriptive social pyramid welled up successive waves of new consciousness, expressed as so many social, cultural and political movements, till eventually the hierarchical social principle was brought down to a considerable extent and simultaneously the unity of ethno-linguistic polity was established. As Professor T.K. Ravindran has insightfully observed: "Political rights could be bestowed only on an evenly based society. Hence social equality had to be brought about first."(1972: ix)

### (i) Initial Rumblings

“..... In about 1800, an attempt was made by some Izhavas to enter the temple at Vaikkom, but they were butchered and their bodies buried in a tank at the north-eastern corner of the temple. This tank is known as Dalvi Kulam” quotes Professor Rao from a Malayalam source. (1979:59)<sup>12</sup> The first conscious and collective salvo against the oppressive old order was thus fired by the hitherto excluded and polluted Izhava community. Sections of them had benefited from the break up of the *tarwad*, increase in jaggery business and employment in the British army. The new-found economic self-reliance enabled them to take up the challenge against the anachronistic and exploitative social order in its religio-ideological sphere. These first and founding martyrs of the modern civil society of Kerala are hardly remembered today.

In Travancore, the activities of Christian missionaries had started early in the eighteenth century. To make converts, they re-kindled the age-old aspirations for social equality among the marginalised masses; their two important planks were campaigns against agrestic slavery and the degrading custom of partial nakedness for men and women; their focus on education among the then much larger mass of ‘untouchables’ too went a long way in changing and challenging the value system of the old order.

The Shanars, another ‘untouchable’ community, which straddled both the Tamil and Malayalam ethnic groups, having been enabled through expansion in education and business, raised the battle cry against a host of civil disabilities during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They, along with several others, were prohibited by ‘custom’ the use of umbrellas, shoes, gold ornaments, etc.; their houses could not have more than a single story; they were not to milk the cow; women were not to cover their bosom; they had to carry water on their head unlike the higher castes; the community as a whole was obliged to perform *corvee* and pay tax. With the spread of education the Shanars were no longer willing to abide by ‘Custom or Tradition’; they began openly flouting the above and other similar prohibitions. Widespread conflicts followed in which they were beaten up, their houses burnt, women were maltreated, their blouses torn up, children’s educational attempts forcefully and violently disrupted and men were forced to do the customary free labour. Yet slowly but steadily the native government, through a series of measures in 1812, 1814 and 1829 gave legal sanctions to the new freedom that

had already become reality in many places, mainly through the efforts of the people themselves supplemented by missionary help and, British and native civilian individuals' support.

The missionaries and individual British officers also consistently attacked agristic serfdom of the lowest castes. The social and economic bondage under which the Parayans, Pulayans, and Chohans were held was so tyrannical and near total, that their emancipation had to be initiated largely from without. Their person was attached to the land, and transfer of the latter meant that of the former also; they had no public or civic role to play in society. Slavery was abolished in the British provinces by 1812 and after much prodding by the British officers, by 1853 in Travancore. However, these lowly placed communities were reminded of the need for strict caste observance. Even mere legal emancipation of the serfs came about in the teeth of opposition from the landed castes of Nayars and Nambudiris.

With the establishment of the British rule in Malabar in 1792, the relative autonomy enjoyed by the Mappilla Muslim tenants, disappeared and the grip of the aggressive caste Hindus over land and society of the region tightened; illegal death duty and unequal taxation were imposed on the Muslim tenants; the earlier British land settlement had largely ignored the traditional land rights of the tenants and gone in favour of the revenue collectors, who again were the dominant Nayars and Nambudiris. In Malabar, thus, the escalated and British-abetted agrarian oppression provoked the rural masses to revolt. Of the earliest uprisings not much is known; between 1836 and 1840 sporadic incidents took place in Pandalur, Kalpetta, Irumbulli, Pallipuram and Mankada villages of Ernad and Walluanad taluks of the district. By the middle of the century (1849-1852) the Mappilla uprisings against the oppressive caste-feudalism of Malabar became more consciously collective and widespread. The colonial government was forced to take serious note of the situation. Prof. K.N. Panikkar notes the development of a veritable body of religio-cultural folklore of all types around these uprisings (1989).

Thus already during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the foundation for the new civil society was being laid through the concerted efforts of the submerged masses of Kerala with the support of a few external elements, on a fairly large scale, affecting the pre-modern Malayali social structure and culture in all the three political segments. These early initiatives for

a new societal re-configuration is what set the Malayali *ethnie* apart from the rest of the sub-continental society.

The new emergence was not without conflicts, often violent and long drawn between communities - people lost lives and properties damaged. Every society in transition is characterized by a twin movement: one, with a forward thrust and another, resisting it with a counter movement. A social movement is trajectoryed towards a re-configuration of social power and it is naturally opposed by a counter-movement by those enjoying the status quo (A. Tourraine, 1985). However, the social turbulence, instead of tearing the society to pieces, indeed helped to reassemble the different elements and bring forth a new kind of harmony - a harmony based on just and egalitarian principles - among the contesting groups. The early start of this process had its own advantages: all the classes and communities were beginning to realise that times were changing and that dominance and sub-ordination was becoming increasingly a matter for contestation within political economy and in the sphere of individual achievement, and could not any more be based on religious authority, tradition or particularly on ascriptivity; the situation was further made easier by the fact that socio-political power itself was being wielded in the then Kerala not monolithically but distributed ambiguously among several groups - the British, the local Rajas and the dominant communities.

If struggle against a common enemy is a necessary and important component in the formation of modern-political identity of ethnic communities, then such a struggle had indeed been initiated in Kerala by this period. Caste-feudalism, exacerbated in its late stage and propped up by the colonial political structure was the enemy identified as such by the emerging masses. Such an identification, though not unique, was peculiar to Kerala of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

### *(ii) Print Capitalism and imagined community*

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw not only the spread and radicalisation of the movement towards the creation of a modern civil society constitutive of the hitherto relegated masses but also fired the imagination of a section of the upper echelons of the society, provoking in them a new consciousness of and aspiration for a unified Malayalam *ethnie*. Formal abolition of slavery, partial concessions in the matter of female clothing, sporadic attempts at temple entry and intermittent

thrusts at landlordism, all these were just the beginnings of what promised to be a long and arduous journey. The situation in the three regions was uneven, yet the British overlordship did impose its own administrative unity across them. The pattern of British dominance itself was ambiguously poised; while strengthening the native feudalism, of necessity, at the same time, almost by default it was sowing seeds of new consciousness among the traditionally excluded masses. Commercialisation of agriculture, exacerbation of landlordism through British props, and the general widening of cleavage between the lower and higher rungs of the traditional social order were the context in which radicalisation of the movement towards the new civil society took place, and this affected even the imagination of the elite.

The most effective weapon in the hands of the masses engaged in radicalising the process was the modern literacy-education. The part that literacy-education plays as the new site for the masses struggling towards modernization and politicization, both at the individual and collective levels, could hardly be exaggerated. Massification of education is a complex phenomenon consisting of several parallel processes such as standardisation of language, leading to cultural-symbolical bridging of the erstwhile segmented communities, institutional proliferation, paving the way for intensification of social interactions and communication among groups and the emergence of an anonymous and mass-reading public followed and promoted by popular-vernacular journalism. Such a process has two dimensions: one intensification of 'social communication' (Karl Deutsch, 1953) signalling the advent of a modern society; and 'universalisation of clerisy' (Gellner, 1983), necessitating social merger of smaller communities into a larger anonymous society. This same process of simultaneous proliferation and democratisation has been termed by Ben Anderson as 'print capitalism,' which enables the ethnic group to re-constitute itself both in imagination and actuality as the new, internally power-homogenised civil-political community.<sup>14</sup>

Right to universal education was achieved by the masses in Kerala through a number of long-drawn-out struggles and enormous sacrifices on their part, during the second half of the nineteenth century. The traditionally literate and hence dominant communities of the Nayars and Nambudiris, understandably did what they could to prevent this new arrival of the masses: atrocities were committed on the lower castes;

violent clashes took place; schools were burnt down. But as the movement escalated and reached a point of no return, several members from the aggressive communities themselves joined this mass effort at universalisation of education by providing leadership and guidance. The missionary support was there, though not indiscriminately. However, the torch-bearers were the members of the different relegated castes themselves. In this context, the historical role played by the Izhava community in throwing open the barbed preserve of literacy to all and sundry, needs to be highlighted.

Early in the century, the Christian missionaries of various denominations had spread a network of primary schools in all the three regions of Kerala. The different sections of the Izhavas - Nadars, Thiyas, Billavas and others - having gained a minimum degree of economic well-being, flooded these schools in large numbers, making a concerted and collective bid for appropriating their rightful place in the emerging civil society. Subsequently they demanded that the native states, particularly Travancore, change their policy of discriminating against the polluted castes in education and employment. In 1885 Dr. Palpu, a learned Izhava,<sup>15</sup> demanded the removal of all disabilities against lower castes: in particular the struggle was for their entry in state-run schools and employment in bureaucracy. The negative response of the state only encouraged Dr. Palpu to intensify both organization and agitation. Right to public school entry for the lower castes was wrested out of the unwilling hands of the dominant castes in a protracted struggle, stage by stage by the tireless efforts of Dr. Palpu and his associates. Spread of education among these communities did not wait for the royal clemency alone; much of it came through community's own effort. Before the right to public school entry was won, between 1875-1891 for example, literacy among the Izhavas rose from 3.15% to 12.10%. The struggle of the Izhavas for educational entry, simultaneously opened spaces for all the communities, particularly the most oppressed, for initiating similar struggles.

Change in the social value system in general and towards egalitarianism in particular came about with the expansion of educational network all over the region of Travancore. From 12 in number in 1865, the government and aided schools rose to 1283 in 1900; including private efforts, the total number at the turn of the century was 3683. Both

Travancore and Cochin already then occupied the first and second ranks in education, among all the states and provinces.

The fall-outs of such an outburst of mass education for the emerging civil society in Kerala, were many and significant. The mushrooming of vernacular educational institutions for the masses inevitably saw the Malayalam language enter the phase of 'print capitalism'. Textbooks and other study aids had to be produced for mass consumption, which also meant standardisation of language. Language manipulation ceased to be the ascriptive privilege of the few; printed grammar books, and dictionaries brought the language to non-contextual anonymity of production and marketing spheres. *Malayalamayute Vivakaranam* in 1862 and *Kerala Kaumudi* in 1875 initiated this process of commodification. Public libraries sprang up in important towns all over Kerala - Trivandrum in 1889, Ernakulam 1870, Trichur 1873 and Kottayam 1882. Narrative as representing the nation made its appearance - *Kundalatha* (1887), *Indulekha* (1889) and *Marthanda Verma* (1891). The immortal trinity of modern Malayalam poetry began their work during this period: Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Parmeswara Iyer (1879-1949) and Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958).<sup>16</sup> Parallel to the institutional education of children in schools, went the non-institutional education of the adults through the newfound medium of magazines, journals and newspapers. The rate of growth of these is no less impressive than that of the schools: *Rajya Samacharam*, 1847, *Paschimodayam* 1847, *Gnamukshepam* 1948, *Western Star* 1860, *Kerala Patrika* 1870, *Satyanadakahalam* 1876, *Kerala Mitran*, 1881, *Kerala Patrika* 1884, *Kerala Sanchari* 1886, *Malayali* 1886, *Nasrani Deepika* 1887 and *Malayala Manorama* 1890. To these, Chaitanya adds the emergence of Arabi-Malayalam to significant level and the invaluable contribution of Christian Missionaries for standardization of the language through grammars and dictionaries.<sup>17</sup>

We had mentioned the change of heart among some at least of the aggressive communities and their participation in the process of change. In the massively expanding linguistic sphere, literacy-education-journalism, the traditionally literate communities found a terrain for changeover to a new mode of leadership of the masses, based on achievement, and involving intense and indiscriminate social interaction with all sections of the population; and this in fact was a linguistically caused social merger, though limited in intent and extent, triggering off an *ethnie*-wide comradely imagination. Text

books and journals had to be mass-produced, distributed but also accepted; and this meant collaboration and cooperation of practically all sections of the society. Understandably much of the creative work was done by the same upper classes, thus maintaining their earlier leadership and control; but the difference in the new scenario was that the consent and cooperation of the masses had become crucial. The new language had to be recognised and accepted by the people as their own, in other words the instruments - books and journals - needed to be designed for the people. The standardised language, therefore far from being a monolithic imposition from above or an aggrandizement of the same old elite language, had to be now a composite, and hence, democratised one, absorbing more or less elements from the folk lore, as a concession for and indicative of the new assertion of the emergent masses in other realms such as economy and politics.<sup>18</sup> It is in this precise new way of power and resource-sharing that the linguistic culture becomes in modernity the new locale of identification for all sections of the society.<sup>19</sup> It is significant to note that the difference between the spoken and the written in Malayalam language is relatively narrow and small in comparison with similar difference in most other modern Indian languages, signaling a relatively more egalitarian spread of power over culture.

In short, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is crucial to the modern history of Kerala in this: it was during this period that the cultural foundation was laid for the politicization process of the Malayali ethnie; it consisted in the language becoming 'urban-capitalist', mass-based or simply non-contextual; parallel revolutions underlay this phenomenon, that of massification of education and popularization of vernacular journalism. Taken together, this process could be described, not merely as standardisation of language, as is usually done, but as democratisation of culture in general and of language as a symbol system in particular. It is this twin revolution that enabled the people of Kerala to imagine themselves as a new politico-cultural community. What, however, set Kerala apart was the early timing and the massive scale of the process enabling the mass of lower castes to bring down simultaneously, the hierarchical principle of the old order to a considerable extent.

Towards the end of the century in 1891 a Malayali Memorial signed by 10,000 people was presented to the Travancore court asserting the distinct ethnic identity of the Malayalis and the need for excluding the

'outsiders' from the exercise of power within culture. This was promptly followed by an Izhava Memorial in 1896 signed by 13,176 persons demanding that power within culture be exercised not in the same old hierarchical manner but in an egalitarian, that is, modern or socially just way, symbolizing the new aspirations of all the hitherto excluded castes and communities. Together these two memorials constitute the new political assertion of the Malayali ethnic group in modernity. The agenda of one was political unification and ethnic exclusivism and that of the other, socio-political egalitarianism within. Such a competitive combination of the two, constitutes the crux of transition of Kerala from an ethnic group to a new political community. The most vivid and living "human metaphor" of this new societal transformation is the person and profession of Sri Narayana Guru Swamy (1856-1928).<sup>20</sup>

### ***(iii) Human Metaphors of Modern Kerala***

Sri Narayana Guru Swamy was an active socio-political and religious reformer for nearly four decades during the most critical period of Kerala's history. His person and profession, more than that of anybody else, embodies the transformation that the ethnic group as a whole underwent in modern times. The Guru has been considered as a caste-regional leader by nationalist historians and an Izhava religious reformer by lower caste writers. Both the versions are seriously flawed. Sri Narayana Guru, first and foremost is an architect of modern Kerala. A multifaceted personality, an intellectual of great calibre and a skilled organizer, Swamy's tireless activities and the numerous institutions he helped to set up, along with the luxuriant undergrowth of supplementary efforts and organizations played a significant role in the formation, that is differentiation and elaboration and politicization, and self-conscious assertion of the Kerala society as a whole.

The Swamy's message was simple and direct: *one God, one religion and one caste*. The implication of this message for the relegated caste masses as well as for the larger society was elaborated as the culture-specific modernization project, a relentless struggle against brahminical and discriminatory caste-hierarchy on the one hand and the construction of an enlightened and an egalitarian social order on the other, through de-brahminisation of religion, universalisation of education, diversification

of occupations and adoption of a generally rational approach towards life, society, history and culture.

The Swamy became a master in the Vedas, set up a number of Vedic schools for the untouchable castes of Izhavas, Cherumas and Pulayas, established scores of de-brahminised temples, mutts and ashrams, wrote several socio-religious works and took to a life of wandering and relentless preaching. The net result of these was a substantial subversion of the ideology of hierarchy, tradition and obscurantism, entirely from within. For the Swamy, critique of brahminical religion was only a starting point in the construction of the civil society. Expansion of modern education in English and Malayalam among all castes and communities was another point of the agenda. "Educate that you may be free and organise that you may be strong" was his motto. Drawing inspiration from his teachings, scores of organisations sprang up at the turn of the century among the lower caste masses, promoting education of their fellowmen. Private schools proliferated, pressure for admission of untouchable castes in government schools mounted and wherever suitable and possible, missionary help was appropriated.

Diversification from traditional occupation was another of Swamy's thrusts in his cultural movement against ascriptive fixity of livelihood of the *avarna* masses. With great farsightedness he advised the lower castes to go for the new trades and industrial employments instead of the hereditary, agriculture-related and traditionally considered degrading occupations. To this purpose industrial exhibitions were organized and vocational training programs conducted in the ashrams.

In Swamy's view, overall progress of the society was possible only with the liberation of the mind from the clutches of superstition and the spread of rationality in all spheres of individual and collective life. The Swamy preached the need for economizing in private and public life, urged the people to give up meaningless and expensive religious rituals and ceremonies, to acquire clean and hygienic social habits and to adopt a rational view towards life in general.

Needless to say this holistic and Kerala-wide social revolution was carried on from the bottom-rungs of the social ladder at the instance and inspiration of Sri Narayana Guru Swamy. But this was indeed a mass effort under the collective and many-sided leadership of stalwarts like Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Sahodharan Aiyappan<sup>21</sup> and

several others of these communities themselves but also including men from the Nayar and Nambudiri communities such as Chattambi Swamigal (1854-1924),<sup>22</sup> Aiyappan Pillai, Krishna Sastri; and several committed men from the dominant communities also became sannyasis under the Guru Swamy—Swami Ananda Theertha, Swami Dharma Theertha<sup>23</sup> and others. Of course that there were differences among these stalwarts drawn as they were from different levels of the changing social order; and also different objectives and trajectories informed the collective efforts of the different groups. This had occasionally resulted in clashes in public. However, the bottom-line of all these new mobilisations was unambiguous, uniform and clear: recognition of the fact that times were changing and that 'achievement' and not 'ascriptivity' was to carry weight in the public sphere. Therefore, the differences within did not lead to undue animosity among groups or to socio-political separatism as they began to do in the later period. The processes of homogenization of social power and its congruence with culture within the Malayali *ethnie* during the early part of this century were no sectarian affair and no section of the society was left untouched.

Among the several other luminaries who made up the new socio-political horizon of modern Kerala, special mention must be made of Ayyankali, (1866-1941) a somewhat colourful, yet very humane revolutionary personality on whom fell the arduous task of carrying the egalitarian message to the bottom-most rungs of the social order. Himself an illiterate Pulya, Ayyankali's name is rightly identified with the educational movement among the Cherumas, Parayas and Pulayas and particularly among the women folk. In 1914, Ayyankali organised the first-ever agricultural strike in Kerala demanding, significantly, the right of the Pulaya girls to be admitted to public schools. Perinad of Quilon witnessed also the drama of social protest under his leadership when hundreds of Pulaya women publicly cast away the *kallumalai* (garland of stones), the symbol of their social slavery. No less dramatic was the mass entry of the Pulayas driving their bullock carts into the city of Ernakulam, defying custom and tradition. Needless to add, these collective social and political assertions by the emancipated slaves brought about severe repression and atrocities from the dominant groups. However, as we have indicated, even among them there were several individuals who did take the side of these new arrivals. Ayyankali's earliest comrade-in-arms in the educational movement as well as Narayana Guru's close confidante were men from the dominant Nair community.<sup>24</sup>

The life and message of Abdul Kadir Maulvi (1873-1932) are also to be added to the luminaries of the time. Writes K.V. Krishna Ayyar, "He urged his co-religionists to give up all their un-Islamic practices. He was never tired of asking the youth to take to modern education and associate themselves with all progressive movements. He founded the *Swadeshabhimani*, which has become immortal by its association with K. Ramakrishna Pillai as its editor. It is said that Sri Narayana Guru spent some time in the Maulvi Saheb's residence to learn the general principles of Islam."

Transition to civil society or modern nation as a new kind of socio-political community based on equality and horizontal comradeship has been deconstructed, as constitutive of mass education, social mobility, occupational diversity and anonymity of social membership by Ernest Gellner (1983). General acceptance of at least formal equality among men of all castes and communities is attendant on this complex process. In the Gellnerian sense, then, the age of Sri Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and the scores of their colleagues was the period when Kerala took the first steps towards such a transition.

The most important concomitant of this ethnically-wide mass upsurge against the millennia old hierarchical ascriptive was the sense of a common nationality. The pre-existing linguistic unit of the three political segments of Cochin, Malabar and Tranvancore now began to be also conceived as naturally and logically constituting a single socio-political entity. The numerous associations and institutions, both religious and secular, imbued with the message of universal education, social mobility and formal egalitarianism as a new way of life, more or less linked to Sri Narayana Guru's name and inspiration, sprang up everywhere in Kerala as the mark of new emergence. Already during Swamy's life-time more than a hundred temples, mutts and shrines mushroomed in all the three regions. An egalitarian, rational-secular yet culture-specific social ideology thus came to inform, percolate and permeate the pre-existing linguistic unity. In the words of Professor Rao, ".....the message of the Swamy spread all over Kerala and reached the masses at the village level and every household imbibed the spirit of Swamy's teachings".(1979:47) Of all the provinces and states of the sub-continent it was here that struggle against the hierarchical social order within the ethno-linguistic group kindled a common sense of nationality leading to a relatively more homogenous and harmonious civil society. Being a Malayali now

became a possible nay, indeed desirable public identity for all sections of people.

#### **(iv) *Paura Samathuvam***

Beginning with the emancipation of agrestic slaves, and the sporadic attempts to defy the caste segregation and disabilities, the various collective efforts at mass education, diversification of occupation, democratisation of religio-cultural practices, appropriation of the new opportunity structure and social mobility, all these culminating in the new social emergence of the masses, by the first quarter of the present century have created a minimum civil space for formal political articulation, that is, demand for a share in state power. From the civil society to political society seemed to be the second logical step; with changes in the former, the old style of dynastic or oligarchic politics looked anachronistic. The new politics needed to be constructed on principles of freedom, democracy and equality of citizenship.

The outcome was the formation of Civil Rights League in 1919 informed by the new concept of *Paura Samathuam* - equal citizenship for all. The Abstention Movement that followed, demanded adult franchise, to be expressed through communal representation of all caste-communities in state assemblies, bifurcation of Dewoswam administration and revenue department to facilitate employment of all castes in state bureaucracy, and final politico-legal abolition of all forms of civil disabilities of the hitherto relegated and lower caste masses.<sup>25</sup> This broad-based political front was constructed by a host of comparable and similarly positioned communities who through their earlier socio-cultural and economic struggles had reached a kind of parity among themselves. The main among these were the Izhavas and Shanars (now Nadars), the Christians and Muslims; though there were certain ambiguities in the political consciousness of these communities particularly of the Christians and less of the Muslims, who had some vested interests in the perpetuation of social hierarchy and their relationship with the lowest groups such as the Pulayas and others, in the early phase of the struggle at least the identity and hence the recognition of the common enemy was unambiguous, that is, caste-feudalism and its human agency, that is, those who considered themselves the upper castes and thus had a stake in maintaining the system. While political and social antagonism continued in relations with the upper echelons, who were increasingly being dislodged, violence of the earlier decades has become a rare phenomenon

now. Moreover, increasingly larger sections of the Nayars and Nambudiris themselves had begun to participate and lead in the process of constructing a democratic society and polity.

The twenties and thirties saw several important changes in succession within society expressing the ascendancy of the new spirit and values; political reforms enabled the lower castes to be appointed for public posts and to be elected for legislatures; in 1936 all temples were declared open for the masses; the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929 made significant concessions to the lower tenure holders who were mostly Mappilla Muslims; and land tax as a condition for voting rights was done away with.

The Travancore State Congress was formed in 1938 and the State Unit of the Communist Party of India in 1939. Formal political articulation in Kerala has by and large been a gathering-up, consolidation and extension of the earlier social and cultural struggles of the different, generally lowly placed groups, unlike in several other regions. The emergence of the Communist movement in particular through its formally universalist ideology transformed the segmented struggles into a non-sectarian movement for economic betterment and socio-political egalitarianism for the masses as a whole. Under the young and spirited leadership of E.M.S. Nambudiripad freedom struggle itself, unlike elsewhere, was formulated as freedom from landlordism-caste-feudalism as much as from foreign imperialism through the construction of an egalitarian and United Kerala.<sup>26</sup>

#### **(v) Aikkya Keralam**

In the wake of modernity, it has been observed everywhere that consciousness of culture – its claimed unity and boundary - emerges, whether this translates itself into nationalism or not. This is a clear indication that modernity is not to be monolithically identified with an universalist agenda but to be viewed as particularistic (cultural) implementation of universalism. Accordingly, the anti-caste (egalitarian-universalist) forces of Kerala, in the course of their mobilization came to discover the necessity of unifying the fragmented ethnic group into one society. What is peculiar to the phenomenon here is that the emergent boundary-consciousness along with the setting up of the insider-outsider-dichotomy, has been supportive of and subservient to the major agenda of egalitarianisation of social relations within.

After the Second World War it became clear that the British were making preparations for withdrawal from the subcontinent. The period was crucial for the future identity of Kerala: the century-and-half long collective struggles - anti-caste, educational, peasant etc. and the sacrifices of great men, from the early martyrs to the later stalwarts - Narayana Guru Swamy, Kumaran Asan, Ayyankali, Sahodharan Aiyappan, T.M. Nair, E.M.S. and others were to mature and bear the fruit of a United Kerala.

Last ditch efforts on the other hand, by representatives of caste-feudalism and imperialism to disrupt the process of the unification of the ethnic group and its congruence with the new political structure were made through demands such as the separate State of Travancore. During the period of anxious anticipation in the forties however, there was a wide spread cultural efflorescence among the Malayalis: imaginative literature - poems, stories, dramas, songs, ballads etc. proliferated in all parts of Kerala signifying an effective invention of the past as the basis of a future unified political community (M.J. Koshy 1972). Victory was assumed for the Malayalam speaking people: the *ethnie* was being politicised into a United Kerala State but with definitely abated social hierarchy, a scenario of relatively power-homogenised culture. In the case of Kerala, it could truthfully be said that the demand for *Aikkya Keralam* was raised and successfully carried through on the support base of those groups that have newly come into their own that have discovered or created a new vested interest in the reconstitution of ethno-political integrity. The new vision was captured in 1948 by E.M.S. Nambudiripad in his *Kerala: The Homeland of the Malayalis*.

### III. Abated Social Hierarchy

The above is an abstracted and interpretative account of how ascriptive social hierarchy or the culture-specific varna/caste order, revived and legitimated as it was under the 'non-interfering' colonialism of the nineteenth century, was brought down considerably, primarily by its own victims - the mass of lower castes - themselves, of course with support (ambiguous) from the missionaries, individuals in the colonial bureaucracy, and not the least, the scores of 'upper caste' men who began to recognise the changing signs of times. To quote Professor Ravindran again,

"The idea of modern Kerala, sparked through the last years of the nineteenth century, arising as it did among the lower classes

of the society and flowing of its own to the midst of the privileged classes' (1972: iv).

The Professor continues in a polemical tone,

'A bedlam that was Kerala at the dawn of this century shook off its glaring caste villainies and presented the image of a more balanced societal relations by the thirties. It had changed beyond recognition within a quarter of a century and the trends of medievalism were nowhere to be seen. Untouchability, Unseeability and Unapproachability had become things of the past. Today caste distinctions are less pronounced and inter-caste marriages are more general in Kerala compared to other states where the historical reform movements originated. This is because, here a fundamental and thorough change in the mental frame of the social classes was effected whereas in the former this was feeble and there the reforms were superimposed. In Kerala the movements for change came from below' (1972:32).

Avowedly, the picture is an abstracted and hence, a valorised one, that is, the context of the various collective efforts, the several ambiguities within them, as well as the counter- tendencies which ultimately became overpowering under the engulfing pan-Indianisms and internationalisms of all kinds, have not been given their due place in the narrative. For example, the movement for the unification of the scattered ethnic fragments – the native states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar -- was carried on within a larger process of meta-cultural unification of the Indian nation-state, within which Kerala itself as the homeland of the Malayalis, was to become a fragment. Thus the autonomy enjoyed by the anti-hierarchical as well as the unification movements was only relative and that too, was fast eroding as pan-Indian politics gained momentum after the formation of the 'national' and 'international' political parties. The 'roll-back' process which indeed was never totally absent, had started almost simultaneously and in contestation with the unfolding process itself.<sup>27</sup> Those who have concentrated on the post-colonial developments in Kerala society and polity have rightly noted the wrong directions and distortions that had by then set in Kerala's social development. (M.A. Oommen 2000). Finally though it had been suggested that the historical configuration of new social power and the attendant imagination of a cultural totality was peculiar to Kerala, it certainly was not unique to the region even within the subcontinent. Similar process of egalitarian social

development within ethno-linguistic cultures elsewhere also could be observed and abstraction formulated.<sup>28</sup> With all such provisos, it could still be said of Kerala that the ethno-linguistic region, historically and comparatively speaking, did undergo ideological as well as actual changes perceptively in the direction of abatement of the traditional social hierarchy: receding of religion and other sectarian primordialities to personal and social spheres and emergence of intellectual-moral consensus concerning attitude and behaviour in the new public sphere, largely through the efforts of caste-oppressed groups. This led to the creation of a social ambience conducive for, not only the active appropriation of the developmental measures of the new state, but also for the determining of the state policy itself. Such a transformation was not dissimilar, even if only to a limited extent, to what had taken place within the developed world in the wake of modernity. It is on such a level-playing social field of public-moral consensus, fairness, and openness, though grudgingly and only partially, acceded to, for the historically underprivileged and finally the consciousness of and concern for the larger and common Malayali society, that subsequent private as well as public developmental efforts had been constructed for the last two generations. And these earlier developments, now we know, have made definite difference and laid the foundation for the later social reconstruction. On the other hand, in regions where the colonially revitalised traditional social hierarchy, not only passed off without much of a challenge but the Brahminical / Brahminised communities smoothly added the new state power to their already exacerbated socio-cultural domination, the corresponding lack of social development as well as the presence and prevalence of all kinds of communal fragmentations and confrontations could be identified.<sup>29</sup> The lesson to be learnt here is simple and clear: abatement of traditional hierarchy, in the precise sense of abolition of varna/caste order within culture-social ideology is a *conditio sine qua non* for any developmental seeds to take root; and without such an abatement, growth or even development would indeed increase the existing social distortion and cleavage.<sup>30</sup> How in the case of Kerala, the decreasing autonomy of the region, together with the increasing stake of the new elite at the pan-Indian level cut short and successfully reversed the basic process, landing the region mainly in economic but also politico-cultural crises is a story to be told elsewhere.

### End Notes

1. That Kerala's development has been different was noticed first in the

seventies by economists and ever since this observation has become important in any serious discussion on the subcontinent's economic and social development in general. See for details Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (1995), Robin Jeffrey (1993), V.K. Ramachandran (1995) and M.A. Oommen (2000).

2. Amartya Sen prefers the term 'experience' to 'model' as being open-ended and expressive of the ambiguity of the economic scenario of Kerala today. See Amartya Sen (2001). The point is conceded to, in the latter part of this essay.
3. The above are merely indicators illustrative of the State's development. For a detailed treatment of the subject see V.K. Ramachandran (1995). Recently, Kerala was declared as the world's first baby-friendly state by WHO and UNICEF (*The Hindu*, August 6, 2002: p10; see also Rajan Bala, 'A Lesson From Kerala' *The Asian Age*, 30 August, 2002, page 12).
4. See the works cited in Endnote 1.
5. The concept of 'civil society' is a critical one, contingent upon certain transformations that a given society is supposed to have undergone; however, most social scientists in India have chosen to ignore this and use the term as though it were a descriptive term referring to actual society in contrast to state and political spheres. See Neera Chandoke (1995:28)
6. The phrase 'intellectual-moral' is taken from Antonio Gramsci and refers to the changes that take place within culture, at the instance of the new popular consensus being forged by the progressive, though hegemonic, class in modernity. See Gramsci (1971). For its application in the context of the Indian Independence movement, see G. Aloysius (1997), Chapter 7.
7. Though the Shastric varna system was a monolith, in practice it was various in different ethno-linguistic regions as multiple caste systems. (L. Dumont 1970:33) It was only during the colonial period that the caste systems came to be conceived as one and uniform across the country.
8. Within the region-specific varna order, the Nayars, though technically shudras, in practice were distinguished from the others as sat (clean) shudras through their agrarian and sexual nexus with the Nambudiri Brahmins and were considered as good as 'twice-born'.
9. Gellner is ambivalent on the point of internal unity of cultures in pre-modern period. While a same degree of unity in all cultures could not be predicated, the development of language and popular religio-cultural symbolism did impose a fuzzy kind of unity across all sections of the social scale, despite regional and sectional variations. (Gellner, 1983)

10. The implication being that the core element of modernity in this discourse is the emergence of egalitarianism as a notional imperative and an open-ended project, set before the society as a whole precisely through the abolition of ascriptive differentiation and discrimination, and that all other factors such as rationality, instrumental and economical, are consequence of it. The elaboration of this argument is part of the author's major forthcoming monograph.
11. Thus the response of the hitherto relegated mass was not strictly speaking against the feudal order as such but the revitalised and colonially propped up Brahminical casteism, fast becoming unilateral and universalising. Note the close parallel to the situation under the Old Regime in Europe in general but France in particular (De Tocquevillie:1988). For the general impact of the colonial rule, the British's unilateral under-writing of the interests of the upper echelons of the society and their subsequent attempts to change it, see chapter II and IV of G. Aloysius (1997) and the relevant references therein.
12. Note, this was nearly a century and a quarter before the Indian National Congress was reluctantly dragged into the temple-entry controversy, regarding the same temple at Vaikkom.
13. Most studies of nationalism in the third world countries are marred by a non-problematic identification of the 'significant other' or the common enemy outside the proposed nation-state, leading to a unilateral justification of all kinds of revivalism as well as native dictatorships and traditional or re-traditionalised oligarchies. This has also inhibited the development of a critical theory of nationalism through concession of national substance to all and sundry movements claiming to be nationalist. See author's major study (1997).
14. 'Massification' primarily means, that the mass of people have begun to be counted as the single most important factor in all spheres of collective life—livelihood, socio-political organisation and cultural activities and in deference to this, changes are being effected and accepted as necessary by all. This is merely another way of saying that culture as the totality of a way of life is being democratised. This process of democratisation however simultaneously engenders a heightened sensitivity to exploitation and injustice in social and group relations. Social scientists while consistently highlighted the latter, have more or less neglected to grasp the implications of the former, which, from the point of view of the caste-relegated masses, is of utmost significance. The site of such a democratisation process has been rightly identified by both Gellner and Anderson as literacy-education.
15. Dr. Palpu is a medical doctor from the Ezhava community. He was

refused employment in his native state of Travancore on account of untouchability associated with his caste and was forced to seek employment in Mysore state.

- (16.) Of Asan, writes Chaitanya (1971), "It was a very fortunate coincidence for Kerala that one of the greatest figures of the new movement, Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), was born as a member of a socially under-privileged group. For it was the call to programmatic social action, which kept him busy till his death by accident in a boat-wreck, that transformed a pessimism, which might have led to passive inaction, into a sustained courage, that consistently fought all unfair distinctions and worked towards the concept of a family of man."
17. For an elaborate narrative of the literary-publicational development in Kerala of this period see, B.S. Kesavan (1988) and K. Chaitanya (1971).
18. In this sense, the Gellnerian paradigm needs to be recast: Universalisation of clerisy does not mean unilateral imposition of high culture on all sections as Gellner seems to imply, but a negotiated, though unequal settlement in language and lore of the different groups involved in the struggle for new emergence.
19. Identity in the new political arena, particularly for the hitherto relegated classes, is an active process of identification, made possible and indeed desirable to the extent the new ethno-linguistic culture integrates and becomes constitutive of the folk and subaltern cultural elements, in recognition of their new-found place in society, and particularly in economy and politics. It is not, as mostly represented, a mere continuity of the pre-modern 'objective similarity' of one or more of the cultural markers.
20. For a short life and message of this remarkable Swamy, see S. Omana's biography in this series.
21. See the well conceived thesis of M. Sahadevan (1995).
22. For a summary life of Chattambi Swamigal, a close associate of Narayana Guru, see, K.P.K. Menon, 1967, *Chattambi Swamigal: The Great Scholar-Saint of Kerala, 1853-1924*, reproduced in Ananda Wood (1985), pp. 134-172.
23. Parameswara Menon alias Swami Dharma Theertha is the author of the popular and insightful work *The Menace of Hindu Imperialism*. His eventful public career could usefully be read from his autobiography (Malayalam) and also in the Introduction to the latest edition of his work, under the title, *No Freedom with Caste*, edited by G. Aloysius (2004).
24. M.S.A. Rao (1987) mentions several cases of upper caste individuals getting converted to the cause of Narayana Guru, once they came in direct contact with him.

25. This region-specific movement is not to be confused with the contemporaneous pan-Indian 'boycott' movement.
26. Within a broader perspective however, there was a hiatus between formal political articulation and the social trajectory of the mass movements within society. This is indicated below.
27. For the study of social reality within a 'social movement approach' of contesting ideologies, see A. Touraine (1985). Symbolically the second edition of E.M.S.'s book was entitled '*The National Question In Kerala*'. The story of how Kerala as an ethno-region, particularly beginning with the second half of the twentieth century, primarily in the then emerging political sphere, systematically failed not only to conserve the enormous social gains that had been made, but also, largely through pan-Indian incorporation chose to deviate or even repudiate the chosen path could not be narrated here for obvious reason.
28. For Example, Tamil Nadu and to some extent Maharashtra. An attempt to view this problematic from pan-Indian perspective and interpret it within the framework of nationalism is the author's study of 1997.
29. Incidentally, most social scientist researches in the subcontinent rest satisfied with making some kind of generalised statements concerning the different aspects of the society here as a whole, which in the context of the plurality of the situation, turn out to be often meaningless and even illegitimate. In the alternative the comparative is monolithically cast and monotonously repeated as East-West in a value-loaded way privileging the former. New initiatives, for example the study of internal variation, treating the subcontinent as basically diversity in unity would lead to more meaningful insights and conclusions.
30. The specifics of relationship between culture as belief and practice on the one hand and development either social or economic on the other came up for discussion in the context of the debates on modernisation in the sixties and the seventies but soon got bogged down in Euro-centricism. This was so largely because of monolithic understanding and thereby evaluation of culture itself as the materialistic western and the spiritualistic eastern. However, the study of culture has seen significant advances in recent years, which necessitates the reopening of the debate.

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*Man's humanity marks out the human kind*

*Even as bovinity proclaims a cow.*

*Brahminhood and such are not thus wise;*

*None do see this truth alas!*

*One of kind, one of faith and one in God is man*

*Of one womb, of one form, difference herein none.*

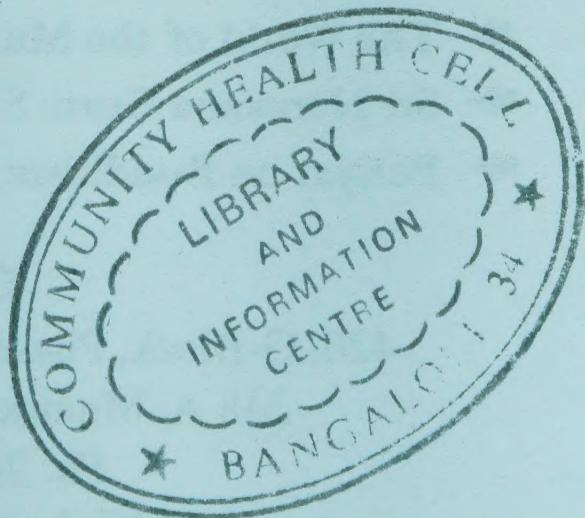
*Within a species, is it not, that offspring truly bred?*

*The community of man thus viewed to a single caste belongs*

*Of the human species is even a Brahmin born, as is the paraiah too,*

*Where is difference then in caste as between man and man?*

----- **Narayana Guru in Jati Mimamsa (Critique of Caste)**



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G.Aloysius is freelance researcher and social activist. His books include Nationalism Without a Nation in India (OUP) and Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement among the Tamils under Colonialism (New Age International)

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